

Spiritan Horizons

Volume 14 | Issue 14

Article 10

Fall 2019

Multimedia and the Spiritan Misison Today

Jean-Michel Gelmetti

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-horizons>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gelmetti, J. (2019). Multimedia and the Spiritan Misison Today. *Spiritan Horizons*, 14 (14). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-horizons/vol14/iss14/10>

This Wellsprings is brought to you for free and open access by the Spiritan Collection at Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spiritan Horizons by an authorized editor of Duquesne Scholarship Collection.



Jean-Michel Gelmetti
Jean-Michel Gelmetti, C.S.Sp., did a Masters in Multimedia Studies in Duquesne University (2005–2008). Before that, he had License Ès Lettres, Littérature & Sciences Humaines (1973) at Metz before joining the Spiritans in 1980. After license in philosophical and theological studies at Sèvres, he was ordained priest on August 28, 1988. Missionary in Angola from 1988–96, he became editor of *Pentecôte sur le Monde* magazine from 1996–2005. Pastor in Lorraine France, diocese of Metz (2008–11), he joined the formation team in Tanzania (2011–12). He worked in Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, on the production of videos for the US Spiritan Province (2013–2019).

Communication is a means of expressing the missionary vocation of the entire Church

MULTIMEDIA AND THE SPIRITAN MISSION TODAY

Introduction

The 2012 Bagamoyo XX General Chapter (1.10), “Be Fervent in the Spirit,” urges that “Greater use has to be made of the latest information technology, not for our own personal interests, but as a way of making ourselves known and as a means to evangelization.” Fr. John Fogarty, the superior general, commented in 2016:

New technologies have revolutionized our means of communication, and we have come to understand more clearly that our community witness – the way we live together as an international and intercultural family – is integral to our mission if we are to make credible the dream of Jesus for a new humanity.¹

This echoes Pope Francis who insists on using the media effectively in the Church’s mission: “Communication is a means of expressing the missionary vocation of the entire Church [...] The revolution taking place in communication media and in information technologies represents a great and thrilling challenge; may we respond to that challenge with fresh energy and imagination as we seek to share with others the beauty of God.”²

The Focus of this Article

This article accepts the communication challenge of Pope Francis. It makes the case that in our evangelizing efforts and in making the community witness of Spiritans better known, greater attention should be given to those current trends in information technology that respond to evolving styles of acquiring knowledge of the world. It describes those evolving styles, the paradigm shift in the manner of consuming information, and the implications of all this for our evangelizing mission. Plotting how current media are adjusting to the paradigm shift, it singles out audio-visual technology as particularly apt and calls for the formation of young Spiritans in this evolving field. It posits that such communication technology works best in a team of persons with complementary expertise in the field.

External and Internal Communication: the Need for Quality

It is usual to distinguish between external communication and internal communication. External communication for purposes of evangelization addresses persons and groups in the outside world. Internal communication addresses members within the Congregation to boost their ethos and mission morale. My focus is on external communication, which because it reaches the general public, must be of high quality, both in form and content. But what is said here applies in a secondary manner to internal communication. This is because, when it comes to audio-visuals, the Internet does not distinguish internal from external communication. A video published on a site with limited access and for internal communication is published on any of the mainstream platforms, such as *YouTube*. Such platforms by definition are open networks and videos published in them are continually indexed by search engine robots³ and, with time, eventually show up in people's Internet searches. So, quality production applies in a sense to both external and internal communication.

*quality production
applies in a sense to both
external and internal
communication*

Our provinces traditionally rely on printed matter (especially magazines). A magazine tries to attract an outside audience and has this audience as its reason for existence. Magazines are adjusting to the trends of the time in order to draw interest and hold the readers' attention. They are paying greater attention to the design, presentation, and look of articles; they watch their length and place illustrations and graphics according to carefully applied aesthetic and efficient rules. Yet, the subscription to these magazines continues to decrease. To more effectively reach those we target in our evangelizing efforts, we need to try something new, beside or even instead of the print media. Audio-visual technology lends us an opportunity to drive the message home. It can serve to populate and update the contents of the various province websites and social media contexts.

Communication: Printed versus Non-Printed

The younger generations perceive the world differently from their forebears. Two different kinds of perception influence our understanding of and accounting for the world. We are more or less familiar with one or the other depending on age, training, and cognitive habits. No value judgment is involved. Nor is it a question of a better or worse way of communicating. It is rather a question of linking to two different types of media. And one of these

Spiritans need to venture into this “other world” and context that young people find themselves at ease with

We are grappling with a paradigm shift in the realm of communication. Screens and monitors have become ubiquitous

media appeals particularly to young people. Spiritans need to venture into this “other world” and context that young people find themselves at ease with.

Book versus Screen, Logic versus Emotion

Another way of saying the same thing is to contrast print versus screen, logic versus emotion. In a civilization based on the written word, the architecture of discourse has a beginning, a middle, and an end, that is, it obeys the logic of the sentence. We have learned to think, preach, and even entertain ourselves on a structural basis of thought that is roughly “subject-verb-complement,” “thesis-antithesis-synthesis,” “introduction-development-conclusion.” This is the “Logic of the Book” or the “Logic of Discourse.” But such is no longer the intuitive habit of the younger generations who are glued to screens. For them, the “Logic of the Screen” is at play, with its audio-visual language and intuitive navigation, free of the need to follow a strongly predetermined model as in the “Logic of the Book.” This Logic of the Screen represents a 180° shift from the culture of the written-word where the logical function intervenes at the beginning. The Culture of the Screen, the culture of the digital age, is a culture where the logical function intervenes only at the end, while the emotion reigns at the starting point and must be “digested” to produce some logical function with multiple choice.

We are grappling with a paradigm shift in the realm of communication. Screens and monitors have become ubiquitous with the development of cell phones, touch screens, tablets, and laptop computers. The gap has become a gulf between certain forms of the discourse of the church and that of younger people. The latter relate better to a new form of discourse informed by fast-paced, multi-layered, and ever-changing, emotion-based information flows. We attempt to engage them via what looks to them like an archaic and boring “Logic of the Book” that they intuitively tend to reject for their more familiar “Logic of the Screen.” This means that, communication-wise, Spiritans and the church, on one hand, and the younger generations, on the other, exist in two differing realities of knowledge. Spiritans and the church are more generally in the “Logic of the Book/Discourse/Speech,” while the youth has moved from the culture of the written-word to that of the digital age, the “Logic of the Screen.”

Paradigm Shift: Why attempt a Response?

A hundred and fifty years of cinema and seventy-five years of television have accustomed spectators to expect a certain type of information delivery. Cinema and television impact the heart before the head, the emotion before the mind. We said that this new digital age relies on a fast-paced, multifaceted audio and visual stimulus. It often means that many strands of information are simultaneously experienced. Modern news-casting is an example; the same screen might have video, scrolling text, and a verbal voice-over or an anchor speaking. We are even on the cusp of a new era where information immersed in virtual reality may already be accessed in some departments of knowledge, such as education, medicine, museums, the reconstruction of archaeological or historical sites, even the sale of objects in stores, etc. This virtual reality will become more and more accessible as technology evolves and as the habit of being in a situation of “emotion-toward-logic” versus “logic-toward-emotion” becomes increasingly common.

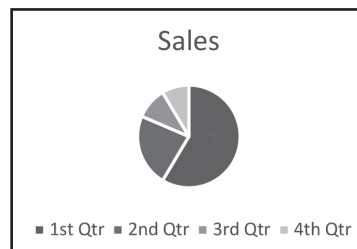
For us Spiritans, it is less a question of finding a bridge to the screen-informed world than speaking and acting from within it

For us Spiritans, it is less a question of finding a bridge to the screen-informed world than speaking and acting from within it. To do this, we really have to engage in being present on screens.

Various Ways of Meeting the New Demands in Communication

Most schools, parishes, and institutions now run a website. Publishers of magazines, websites, and Powerpoint presenters, as intimated above, are trying their best to meet the new demands by countering the tedium of text-intensive

writing. Websites have fewer long texts, are dotted with bold titles, subheadings, and short paragraphs, with a “Read more” button that allows the user to click and get more details for rather long paragraphs. Such less directive and more attractive websites emphasize graphic design, use of images, charts, and video.



The same goes for other media like *Facebook*. Photo-editing software like *Photoshop* allows an ordinary skilled user to superimpose images from archives. Use of

sound effects and animations (of texts, multiple images, infographics) enhance the reader's experience. Pictures from the archives can be given new life through such methods. Voice-over commentaries may elicit the appropriate emotion, background music may create the appropriate atmosphere.

The Making of Short Videos

*the making of short videos
is only a first step towards
a better use of the "latest
information technology*

Since websites can be created by anybody using a CMS (Content Management System) platform like *WordPress* and many others, short videos stand out in modern multimedia information. Spiritan multimedia training should be oriented towards the production of such short videos. What is still a problem is regularly updating websites with new content, and any website not regularly updated is soon abandoned. Thus, the making of short videos is only a first step towards a better use of the "latest information technology." A second and perhaps more important step is constant updating. Videos are very good ways of making these updates, besides they provide ever-new content that is accessible to the screen and thus to the emotion-driven generation. Audio-visuals help websites make the transition from printed text to screen, from the "logic towards emotion" to the "emotion towards logic" contents.

Audio-visual Quality

As noted above, all videos, regardless of their internal or external destination will be reachable from their distribution platform. Hence the insistence on quality (sound, image, framing, and editing) of any videos published online. Quality of form attracts, poor quality repels. When viewing news, scrolling text does not captivate, even if the content of the information and the music chosen are excellent. Even when the scrolling text content is better than that offered by a team of TV news professionals, people prefer the quality of presentation they are used to.

*The cooperation of
different professionals
allows for better effects*

The cooperation of different professionals allows for better effects - well-lit studios with several cameramen taking shots from various angles, multiple mixer tables, sound effects etc. This is what we are sub-consciously choosing, since cinema and television have shaped tastes and expectations in terms of form quality. And teamwork enhances quality. Multimedia production left to a single individual cannot reach the minimum level of quality demanded by the public. For reasons explained above, it is

likely to be rejected and the rejection may have little to do with content, rather the form of delivery.

We can hardly attain the level of technology and skills necessary for the production of documentaries, films, or newscasts. Yet a certain level of quality is obligatory in our external multimedia communication. Thus, Spiritans working in multimedia need good professional training. One thing that may give us pause is the cost of equipment. Yet, the cost of filming equipment which used to be prohibitive, is decreasing constantly. Besides, training and forming Spiritans in multimedia production and narrative technique can promote Spiritan mission in various ways and help make the Congregation and its activities better known.

A few Statistics

On *YouTube* in 2019, one billion videos were seen per day. This illustrates a clear predominance of video media on the Net. The following predictions of video marketing use are a good example of this predominance.

- on average, the French people each watched 190 videos in January 2014 (more than 16 hours).

- 59.7% of videos were viewed online in 2008, this increased to 78% in 2014.

- 85% of French Internet users saw at least one video on the Internet during the month of January 2014 (40.5 million, 66% of the population).

- video on Demand (VOD) will multiply three times in 2016.

- it will take 6 million years to watch all videos downloaded in one month in 2016.

- when someone looks for your name on the Internet, they prefer to click on a video: the chance of viewing a video than reading written content is twice greater.

- 36% of videos viewed on the Internet are advertisements.

- in 2019, 80% of global data traffic will be linked to video.⁴

The Production of Multimedia as Part of the Mission of the US Province

Over thirty videos were produced. About half dealt with Spiritan works; the other half dealt mostly with events at Duquesne University

The US Provincial and his Council recognized multimedia as an important part of the mission of the province. I was mandated to produce short videos illustrating our mission and works. As the creation and maintenance of the website by a coordinated team is facilitated by the choice of a proper CMS platform, I concentrated since December 2013 on the production of short videos, working with multimedia professional, Dr. Dennis Woytek, a retired (2016) professor from Duquesne University, who has vast experience in radio and video production. The provincial council allocated a budget for equipment, travel, and other related expenses. Over thirty videos were produced. About half dealt with Spiritan works; the other half dealt mostly with events at Duquesne University. The former required the long chain of pre-production, production, and post-production processes; the latter did not involve this heavy chain of production.

The videos have been published on the US Province website. We could not distribute the videos on other sites where they could be useful, mainly because of lack of time and shortage of staff in this less than minimal team. A further team member could do this dissemination work via social media and liaison with those responsible for websites and communication in Spiritan Provinces, communities and for projects, again without the need for specialized training in the field of video production.

Short videos could also highlight areas such as: Spiritan individual community or institution (school-, parish-, or mission-based) projects

Production ideas are numerous. We have material for future videos on Spiritan Life (for example on Lay Spiritan Associates), and for historical Spiritan videos – see for example, the video at: <https://youtu.be/163vx6DpId8>. These short documentary-style videos describe Spiritan communities and their pastoral work in the US based on the theme “See How They Love Each Other.” An example is the video, ‘The Spiritans in Baltimore’ (2015 – at: <https://youtu.be/jiwi4Y8ZqNc>), about two Afro-American parishes served by the Spiritans. It attracted more than 800 viewers (across different platforms) and allowed the Spiritans of St. Edward and St. Gregory to raise funds from different sources.⁵

Short videos could also highlight areas such as: Spiritan individual community or institution (school-, parish-, or mission-based) projects; projects in the planning stage (such as the planned building of a school or a maternity hospital);

projects showing the needs of a population and the worries of its Spiritan pastor. People who feature in them may also find them useful as a resource for their pastoral activities or fund raising. Videos can be used to thank donors for their help or ask for more help to finish constructions or buy equipment or to show how well the project serves the local population. Finally, short videos can feature the life and history of the founders and important figures of the Congregation.⁶ These must be thought out very carefully, including how to illustrate various aspects. For example, I plan a future video of Libermann's stay in Lyon after the time spent in Rennes, at the beginning of his journey to Rome, as this is a significant moment in his life as well as a decisive moment for the Congregation.

A Video Production Team

As I have said before, all this is better done by a video production team who reside in a community. Linking various members with IT skills scattered around the globe in virtual encounters through video-conferencing will not do. Unity of time and space is ideal in this matter. Linking colleagues scattered around the world may be a good thing for different companies and for meetings about specific agendas. But as religious we need community life with sharing of daily prayer and work that the unity of space and time offers. Unity of space facilitates the collection of data for given productions, often subject to very tight schedules before and after production. It facilitates the proper integration of skills and knowledge and the interactions needed to produce quality videos. Of course, teleconferencing services can be used to connect, for example, with archivists or colleagues who are specialized in the history of the Congregation, or to discuss a particular point with members of other communities before sending someone to the field to collect footage and data essential for production, etc.

Conclusion

Print media can still give effective communication about our Congregation that highlights its strength and originality in the Church, its internationality and focus on the most abandoned and rejected by society. But in an era where screen-based communication is omnipresent, and the younger generations are emotion-based, communication must adapt to the way the general public receives most of its daily information. It must observe the paradigm shift noted

an era where screen-based communication is omnipresent, and the younger generations are emotion-based, communication must adapt to the way the general public receives most of its daily information

above, from logic and book to emotion and screen. And one of the best ways of doing this is through short videos.

Taking effective part in modern mission requires the Congregation to train some members in the use of the “language” that engages people today. This language encompasses the effective use of images and sounds within the context of a constantly evolving media. The development of photography, radio, cinema, and television, with their mass distribution, gradually began to take shape in the mid-nineteenth century, at the very time when our Congregation experienced its Libermannian growth. We have to continue to grow and to develop our ability to communicate effectively as Spiritans.

We are called to the same kind of humble learning as any missionary. Missionaries have to learn new languages as if they were children, experiencing once more all the frustrating stages of dependence on others, learning to slowly refine their understanding of new languages, and that, often without the help of textbooks or dictionaries! It is all part of the effort to become “Negro with the Negroes”⁷ and share the history of the people whose culture and destiny we have embraced for the sake of Christ. Exactly the same demand is being made today by the new information technologies and multimedia.

*Jean-Michel Gelmetti, C.S.Sp.
Duquesne University*

Endnotes

¹Rome, Spiritan Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Generalate in Rome.

²48th World Communications Day, 2014.

³This is how many Spiritan videos meant for internal communication have become publicly available. Even those on a password-protected Spiritan website ultimately end up indexed by engines such as Google. The very nature of the Internet delivers them to the general public even though they were not so intended.

⁴See for example, at <https://www.omnicoreagency.com/youtube-statistics/> or <https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2017/03/08/video-marketing-statistics>.

⁵According to Honest Munishi, C.S.Sp. (Tanzanian), the Pastor of St Edwards, the then (2015) Ambassador of Tanzania in the USA who saw the video allotted some

funds to the parish; he mentioned also other donations.

⁶I put up one such about Claude François Poullart des Places, at:<https://youtube/5J6dAal0wQg>.

⁷Francis Libermann in a letter to his confreres in Dakar and Gabon, November 19, 1847. See *Spiritan Anthology*, 281-287, here 287.